

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Editorial

Be sure to read the advertisement on page 15 headed "Wanted." If it does not interest you, it may interest some one whom you know.

The National Conference of 1901

Because of our absence from home we have said very little about the National Conference which is programmed to meet at Winona Lake, Thursday, August 29, and close Monday, September 2. It is too late now to suggest that in our judgment it would have been better to begin the Conference, Wednesday, August 28, and close Sunday, September 1. The program has appeared in each issue of the EVANGELIST since its first publication. It was our purpose to keep the work of the Conference constantly before the public, hoping in this way to induce a larger number of our people to attend this annual gathering of the Brethren churches. If churches have not yet elected their delegates they should do so as early as possible. Be sure to elect delegates who will attend the Conference. The last Conference should always be the best we have ever held, and we shall certainly be greatly disappointed if this may not be truthfully said of the first Conference in the new century. Every member of the church and every pastor in particular can do something to make the Conference just what it ought to be.

The New Philosophy

A new light has arisen in the world of thought in the person of a philosopher (we have forgotten his name) who reveals the wonderful discovery that doubt, and not faith, is the great impelling force of progress and civilization. He applies the dictum in numerous and absurd ways to the history of material progress, to intellectual progress, and finally to the question of religion. For example, a man doubts the old manner of life, the old barbarism, the old animalism, the old superstition, and immediately, as a consequence of his doubt, discovers the new and the better. Copernicus doubted the Ptolemaic system, and immediately discovered the true motions and laws of the stars. The heathen doubts his idols, and this reveals to him the true religion.

Our philosopher elaborates his system at great length, and soon uncovers his ulterior purpose, which was to employ it against all religion. He glorifies the doubters of Christianity as the true pioneers of intellectual progress. According to this hand made Solon, our only business is to doubt, doubt, doubt, and we will rapidly emerge into a higher civilization, leaving behind us all the follies and superstitions of the past. The absurdity of the proposition

scarcely merits a serious argument, but we look at it for a moment because it is a curious illustration of the methods of religious unbelief, where a half truth is put for the whole, and conclusions are drawn which are dangerously calculated to deceive the unwary. Doubt never was and never can be a constructive force. It is destructive, and only that. It can tear down, but it cannot build up. It paralyzes all energy and all effort. Normally it is a state of mind produced by rational evidence. With normal doubt we have no quarrel, for it is both our privilege and duty to doubt anything which fails to show rational evidence in its support. From the starting point of this doubt a new faith radiates, faith that the truth exists, that it lies elsewhere, and that it may be discovered. It is therefore not the doubt of the false but the faith of the true which becomes the impelling force of progress. This is so manifest that the counter proposition is grossly absurd. Imagine a man who lays any claim to philosophical thought teaching that a farmer, for example, plows and sows because he doubts whether he can make a crop without plowing and sowing. A school boy will tell you that the farmer plows and sows because he *believes* that by doing this he *will* make a crop. Imagine again our philosopher gravely expounding that a man eats because he doubts whether he could live without eating.

Normal doubt is merely the reverse side of normal faith, and has no existence whatever in the absence of the latter. It is impossible to conceive of it as an independent force, or as a constructive force, or as a lamp of revelation and discovery. Copernicus could not possibly have had any rational doubt of the ptolemaic system of astronomy before he had stumbled upon evidences of the true system. The heathen brought up in the ignorance of his idols must get some glimpse of the true religion, either in the light of his reason, or in the brighter light of a revelation coming to him from outside, before he can possibly doubt the old. A man could not possibly doubt that he could make a crop without plowing and sowing, unless there was in him a prior consciousness, or faith, that he *could* secure a crop *by* plowing and sowing.

It is manifest therefore that every activity, every normal putting forth of energy, the whole vast and complex system of constructive civilization, is based directly upon *faith*, that this is the corner stone of all philosophy, that rational doubt is impossible except in the light of faith, that it bears to faith the same relation as the shadow to the lamp, and that to employ doubt, therefore, as an intellectual or religious guide, is about as rational and safe as the blind leadership of the blind, with a very deep ditch in the immediate foreground. Or, using another figure, about as rational as the conduct of a man who turns his back upon the lamp and follows the shadow.